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# Saint Louise de Marillac's Uncle: Louis XIII's Garde des Sceaux, Michel de Marillac (1560-1632)

By

DONALD A. BAILEY, PH.D.

The name Louise de Marillac, writes Louise Sullivan, D.C., “has largely remained hidden” in the “shadow” of her famous mentor and colleague, Vincent de Paul.<sup>1</sup> A similar shadow has, until recently, hidden the reputation of Saint Louise’s uncle, Michel de Marillac (1560-1632), despite being arguably among the half-dozen most important political figures during the reign of Louis XIII. But in her uncle’s case the shadow was deliberately created by Cardinal Richelieu, who did his best to obscure the memory and anti-war sentiments of his sometime collaborator and ministerial colleague.

At the time of his disgrace, Michel de Marillac was effectively what today we would call the Minister of Justice (in American terms, the Attorney General). He had served in the Royal Council since 1624, for two years as co-*Surintendant des Finances*, and during the following four-and-a-half years as *Garde des Sceaux* — that is, the Keeper of the Seals, appointed to take over all the responsibilities of drafting and adjudicating French law from an out-of-favor, but irremovable, Chancellor. To these posts he brought great intelligence, probity, financial integrity, courage, strong (but perhaps still vague) aspirations for government reform, and immense experience.

He had spent almost a decade as a Councillor in the Parlement de Paris, over fifteen years as a Master of Requests (the king’s principal bureaucratic team for administration and justice, reinforcing the royal will throughout the kingdom and reporting back with their on-site observations), and approximately twelve years as a Royal Councillor primarily focused on financial matters.<sup>2</sup> More remarkably, he had compiled two still unpublished,

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<sup>1</sup> Louise Sullivan, D.C., “Louise de Marillac: A Spiritual Portrait,” in *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences, and Writings*, ed. Frances Ryan, D.C., and John E. Rybolt, C.M. (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 39.

Last year, 2010, marks the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deaths of these partner saints, and the joint celebration of this date should help in shedding greater light upon Louise.

<sup>2</sup> Marillac’s personal life and political career: birth, 28 August 1560; loss of mother, 1568, and of father, 1573; *conseiller lai au Parlement de Paris*, 3 September 1586; marriage to Nicole, dite Marguerite, Barbe de La Forterie (1561-1600), 12 July 1587; three surviving children; *maître des requêtes* 24/5 January 1595; widowhood, 1600, then second marriage, to Marie de Saint-Germain (widow of Jean Amelot), September 1601; *conseiller d’État*, 1612; enters *Conseil d’État*, November 1612; a *conseiller des finances*, 1619; co-*surintendant des finances* (with Jean Bochart de Champigny), 27 August 1624; *garde des sceaux*, 1 June 1626; proclamation / publication of the *Ordonnance du Roi Louis XIII...* (the “Code Michaud”), January 1629; disgrace and arrest, 12 November 1630; death at Châteaudun, 7 August 1632.

but often copied, treatises that were virtually archives / handbooks of the offices and functions of the Royal Council, with special attention given to questions of finance and justice. Two years before his disgrace, he wrote and edited the largest single codification of French law before (and even including) Napoleon's famous codes, and prepared yet another treatise to blunt the inevitable challenge he knew his code would face from the *Parlement de Paris*.<sup>3</sup>

As we shall illustrate in a moment, Marillac was also a zealous, pious, and devout Catholic. But, not only was he a prominent and influential *dévo*t; he was the virtual leader of what was known as *le parti dévot*, that is, the persons and aspirations of the French Catholic Reformation as it involved itself in domestic and foreign political affairs. Because of the all-pervasive intimacy of Church and State in Late- and Post-Medieval Europe, neither Church nor State could be much reformed or influenced without involvement in the other too. At least since the Concordat of 1516, royal appointments to all principal religious offices had been more at the discretion of the French king than under papal control; in addition, political and social affairs were administered as much through ecclesiastical channels as through governmental ones, whether municipal, provincial, or royal, and secular officials continually intruded upon religious and ecclesiastical matters.



Engraving of Louis XIII (1601-1643).  
Public Domain

<sup>3</sup> These treatises bear the titles *Des Chanceliers et Gardes des sceaux de France, du pouvoir et usage de leurs charges et de leurs droitz des sceaux et de la cire; Recueil des Conseils du Roy, et l'origine et réglemens d'iceux. Ce recueil contient seulement des exemples tirez de l'antiquité, de l'histoire et des registres de Parlement et autres, de ce qui s'est observé cy-devant en chacun des articles remarquez et contenus en iceluy*; and *Mémoire dressé par le garde des sceaux de Marillac, principalement contre l'autorité du Parlement*. At least one copy of each can be found at the Bibliothèque nationale de France [BnF] (rue Richelieu site), with additional copies of the latter two, also elsewhere.

Marillac and his half-brother were both relatively close to Marie de Medici, wife, then widow, of Henry IV, and mother of Louis XIII. A secondary diplomatic and military figure, Louis de Marillac had, in fact, married a very distant cousin of the Queen's,<sup>4</sup> and was to play fairly prominent roles in all of the young Louis XIII's military campaigns against the French Calvinists (a.k.a. the "Huguenots"). He was eventually elevated to become one of the marshals (*maréchaux*) of France. Both Marillacs helped Richelieu's return to power in early 1624, and were in turn raised to more prominent posts themselves. All three, as well as the Queen Mother, shared the king's desire to weaken, even eliminate, the Huguenot presence in France, to reform and strengthen the French Catholic Church, and — at least in the case of Cardinal Richelieu and Michel de Marillac — to reform diverse aspects of the financial, administrative, and judicial institutions and practices of royal government.

Corruption, inefficiencies, incompetence, and insouciance towards royal authority were all objects of their reformist concerns — so many concrete examples, yet the myriad of impediments to reform meant that conceptualizing a real program necessarily remained frustratingly vague and erratic. With the 1620s came the gradual beginnings of change, dramatically in the case of Protestant heresy, more tentatively as regards the reshaping of government. Finance, administration, justice, social status, and family connections — as well as the same ecclesiastical considerations — made it equally difficult to formulate and implement reform. But the place and security of France on the European stage was also of importance, and Spanish imperialism, even if considerably disguised as the agent of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, could not be ignored by French statesmen.<sup>5</sup> Challenges from Spain and the Empire to the Mantuan inheritance by an Italian-descended French nobleman (Charles de Gonzague de Nevers) could not be ignored, especially since Mantua was strategically important in the upper Po valley.

Richelieu and the king were also committed *dévots*, but they allowed potential threats to French interests abroad to distract them from their domestic religious and political reform objectives. They tried to keep Michel de Marillac and the Oratorian founder, Pierre de Bérulle (who was to die in 1629), well informed about the realities of Spanish ambitions, but both men continued to minimize the danger from Spain while emphasizing the

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<sup>4</sup> This Catherine de Medici happened, in fact, to be a closer relative of the recent, third Florentine Medici pope, Leo XI (27 days in April 1605), than was the Queen herself. The marriage to Louis de Marillac took place in 1607.

<sup>5</sup> An historian of true objectivity would not note the 20<sup>th</sup>-century parallel here to Soviet imperialism with its disguise of communism, without also noting the equally evident phenomenon of American imperialism disguised with capitalist-related democracy.

urgency of finishing off the Huguenots at home, and strengthening royal authority overall. It was Marillac's persistent objections to the war that led to his disgrace in early November 1630. Louis de Marillac, too, marshal since June 1629 (and one of three generals in command of this very Italian campaign), was summarily arrested, tried in a fixed court, and executed in 1632. Had the *dévots'* insistence on reform prevailed (and the Ordonnance of 1629 not been still-born), the French Revolution might have been avoided, but such speculation is off limits for the professional historian!

Having briefly sketched Marillac's political involvements, we are now free to look at his intellectual and devotional activities, which were perhaps even more remarkable. All aspects of his life and career were thoroughly consistent with those of his ancestors, who — sometimes within the career of a single individual — were to be found in both the political and ecclesiastical arena. Tracing back five generations, a putative paternal ancestor is claimed to have married the equally problematic Antoinette de Beaufort de Canillac, the supposed niece of Pope Gregory XI and grand-niece of Pope Clement VI. Each of these popes played a central role in the history of the fourteenth-century Avignonese Papacy.<sup>6</sup> Over four generations, one or more Marillacs was either a secretary or financial official to various members of the Bourbon family — a fact which should not be overlooked in seeking to explain why a zealous Catholic Leaguer such as Michel de Marillac was eventually persuaded to embrace the not-yet-converted Henry of Bourbon-Navarre as his rightful king in 1593.

Michel had nine uncles and two aunts, whose involvements in military, administrative and / or religious careers ranged from noble service in the family's native Auvergne and other provinces to royal service in the Parisian capital or wherever else the king had need of them. To take but two examples: Charles de Marillac (ca. 1500-1560) was abbot of Saint-Père-les-Melun, bishop of Vannes in Brittany, and then archbishop and count of Vienne in Dauphiné; but he had also undertaken diplomatic tasks in Constantinople,

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<sup>6</sup> Admittedly this takes us at least one generation further than where some Marillac genealogists are willing to be certain of the lineage, but the Marillacs themselves may well have embraced such claims, and so they form part of the family's self-understanding. Anne-Valérie Solignat, "Les généalogies imaginaires des Marillac ou comment faire des siens des gentilshommes de noblesse immémoriale," a paper presented to research colleagues at "Penser l'édition numérique critique: *La Vie de Michel de Marillac* par Nicolas Lefevre de Lezeau — Première journée d'études — Nicolas Lefevre de Lezeau et l'écriture" (23 March 2011).

It was Clement VI who in 1348 purchased Avignon outright from its previous *seigneur*, Queen Joan of Naples; and Gregory XI, who was in 1377 persuaded by Saint Catherine of Sienna to move the papacy back to Rome.

Interestingly, the spirituality of this Catherine of Sienna was to appear in Louise de Marillac's mature writings. <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise>, p. 1 (accessed 12 July 2010).

England, and the Holy Roman Empire, as well as eventually capping various judicial activities with membership in the king's Privy Council. His brother, Guillaume II (ca. 1518-1573), Michel's father, was knighted on the field of battle and capped a long career in royal administration by becoming Comptroller-General of Finances (*contrôleur général des finances*) about five years before his death.<sup>7</sup> The religious commitments of this generation are further revealed in mentioning a third brother's becoming bishop of Rennes,<sup>8</sup> an aunt's being a Dominican nun (and poet) at Poissy, and yet another brother's being disinherited on account of his conversion to Calvinism and subsequent flight to Geneva.

With such a family history it is intriguing that not one of Michel's siblings entered the religious life, even if he himself made two futile attempts as an adolescent. Nonetheless, his own descendants did so in abundance, and at least one male in each generation followed the family tradition of a secular judicial / administrative career too. His daughter, widowed daughter-in-law, three granddaughters, and a great-granddaughter all became Carmelites. Two brothers of this youngest Carmelite became priests, one of them gaining some prominence in intellectual and pious pursuits.<sup>9</sup> Marillac's younger son became a Capuchin (who was nominated to the see of St-Mâlo at the time of his death) and his elder grandson, a Knight of Malta. Except for her prominence and sanctity, Saint Louise de Marillac must be seen as a thoroughly typical member of this extended family, especially when one considers other religious and several zealously pious laymen and -women among Michel's nieces, nephews, and cousins. Here, we find another bishop of relative prominence, as well as persons actively supporting the Company

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<sup>7</sup> It is remarkable how uncertain so much scholarship remains. A major concern for me during the fifteen or so years of working on the Marillacs' genealogy has been consistently turning up either nothing, or else approximate dates for these two important brothers: until recently "ca. 1510" for Charles, and "ca. 1500" for his "younger" brother Guillaume II. Then, I found (without cited sources) that Charles' birth has been assigned ca. 1500, and Guillaume's ca. 1518. What to think?

<sup>8</sup> This brother, Bertrand de Marillac, is among those "reforming bishops" cited in J. Michael Hayden and Malcolm R. Greenshields, *Six Hundred Years of Reform; Bishops and the French Church, 1190-1789* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2005), Appendix 4B-2, p. 379.

<sup>9</sup> This outstanding priest was Louis de Marillac (d. 25 February 1696), *docteur de Sorbonne*, *curé* of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois (1670-94) and then of Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie (1694-96). Also prior of Langeay (or Langey or Langeais), he opened two houses for young monks to meet together with ecclesiastics for pious exercises; in his home, he built a chapel and a cavern for devotions, and this home became a seminary under the name of Saint-Pierre and then Saint-Louis. Being made *Supérieur* of the Regular Clerks of Saint-Paul in 1669, he associated his community with that of the Pontoise Carmel. (For supporting references, see my edition of Nicolas Lefèvre de Lezeau, *La vie de Michel de Marillac (1560-1632)* [PU Laval, 2007], p. 517.)

of the Holy Sacrament,<sup>10</sup> a new group long dreamed of by Michel de Marillac and his *dévo*t associates, but only realized on the eve of his disgrace. Amongst several “zealous and effective assistants of Louise de Marillac,” Louis Châtellier mentions a “Mademoiselle Hardy,”<sup>11</sup> who may well be Françoise le Hardy, marquise de Flamarens, a granddaughter of Louis and Michel’s elder sister Marie de Marillac Hennequin and thus actually a second cousin to Saint Louise herself. Mademoiselle Hardy was one of those who “vigorously solicited Vincent de Paul on behalf of orphans.”

Before addressing the relationship between Michel and his niece, however, let us turn to the uncle’s myriad devout activities. First, his personal zeal for prayer, discipline, and frequent communion. If I may be permitted to quote myself from a recent article:

Well before his entry into high office, Marillac attended all matins in his parish on feast days and Sundays. He practiced the austerities and spiritual mortifications of the Catholic Reformation in France: sleeping on the tile floor of his *hôtel*’s chapel, refusing a feather bed when deteriorating health forced him off the tiles, remaining up late into the night, frequent fasting, etc. He even wore “a belt of small silver bow knots” — that is, a sharply studded girdle around his waist, from which many zealous penitents occasionally sustained bloody wounds. And he often used the “discipline” — a short whip of cords or small chains with which extremely devout persons flagellated themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Marillac had become a Grey Penitent around 1590 and was eventually successful, in 1594, in being elected church warden (*marguillier*) of his parish of Saint-Gervais. Already alluded to was his zeal in serving the Catholic League at the end of the French Religious Wars, before his preference for law

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<sup>10</sup> These are children of Michel’s half sister Valence de Marillac and her husband Octavien II Dony d’Attichy (*surintendant des finances* for Marie de Medici): Louis Dony d’Attichy (1598–1664), a friar of the Minim Order and then bishop of, first, Riez, then, Autun; and Anne Dony and her husband Louis de Rochechouart, count of Maure, both of whom actively supported the Company of the Holy Sacrament while never hiding their animosity towards Cardinal Richelieu, who had so brutally treated Anne’s uncle, Marshal Louis de Marillac. Two other children of Valence and Octavien Dony give us another Carmelite and a Jesuit.

<sup>11</sup> Châtellier, *The Europe of the Devout; The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> “Power and Piety: The Religiosity of Michel de Marillac,” *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d’histoire* 42:1 (Spring-Summer / printemps-été 2007): 8. (The article was reprinted, slightly revised, in *Vincentian Heritage* 28:1 [2008]: 33–56.)



and order, acceptance of the sincerity of Henry IV's promises to convert, and perhaps his family's long association with the House of Bourbon persuaded him to support the still beleaguered king.

His principal achievements, however, were his extraordinary services on behalf of newly founded reform monastic orders in France and his meticulous, spiritually sensitive translations of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation*



Portrait of Michel de Marillac (1560-1632). Engraving by Michel Lasne.  
Image Collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute

of *Christ* and the biblical *Psalms*. Both of these translations enjoyed two or more editions, and the former was a virtual best seller for a good part of the century; it was even twice reprinted in the nineteenth century. Marillac also wrote a treatise on the extent of papal authority over the French Church,



and a history of the founding and early years of the French Carmelites.<sup>13</sup> While under house arrest at Châteaudun, he translated the *Book of Job* and left unfinished his long-in-process "Treatise of the Eternal Life."

Just as the gestation of the reformed, Teresian Carmelites in France was budding, Marillac arrived to assist in the ultimate flowering of their establishment. At this point his fertile hands were everywhere. Beginning with the first convent in Paris in 1604, he handled or actually drafted the papers requiring royal and then papal approval for each new house. Both in Paris and in Pontoise, he helped locate the sites and supervised the workers effecting necessary renovations. He ordered furnishings and supplies, and at every stage provided financial guarantees, actual loans, and even generous gifts, these last sometimes involving dowries for worthy novices from modest backgrounds. Together with Barbe Acarie, he could even be found counselling young novices, a task in which his command of Spanish was often called upon to facilitate the direction expected from Teresian Carmelites recently arrived from Spain. In fact, the first prioress at Pontoise found the ubiquitous pair of Acarie-Marillac rather intrusive, despite her appreciation of their piety and dedication.<sup>14</sup>

By my count, in 1618 there were twenty-two reformed Carmelite convents in France, and it was becoming necessary to defend the future of their independence from the late-arriving (1611) Carmel Fathers. The Fathers oversaw Carmelite convents in some countries, but not in others, and from the beginning Marillac had sought their assurance that they would not try to interfere with the French establishments. Insisting upon this story was one reason, no doubt, for the book he wrote in 1622 on the Carmelites' earliest years in France.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, he also collaborated with Madame Acarie

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<sup>13</sup> The former work is *Examen du livre intitulé Remonstrance et conclusions des gens du Roi, et arrest de la cour de Parlement du vingt-sixième novembre M.D.C.X., attribué faulsement à M. Servin, conseiller du Roy en son Conseil, et son advocat en la cour de Parlement de Paris, comme ayant esté faicte en ladicté cour sur le livre du cardinal Bellarmin, pour monstrier les ignorances, impertinences, faulsetés et prévarications qui se treuvent presque en toutes les pages*. N.p.: N.p., 1611.

For the latter work, see footnote 15.

<sup>14</sup> This was Anne de Saint-Barthélemy (1549-1626), one of the Spaniards who had been especially close to Saint Teresa of Avila herself. We hope for the imminent publication of the papers presented at the colloquium celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Monastère de Saint-Joseph at Pontoise: "Le Carmel: quatre siècles à Pontoise 1605-2005" (19-20 Novembre 2004). My presentation was titled, "Michel de Marillac et le Carmel de Pontoise" (presented 19 November 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *De l'érection et institution de l'Ordre des Religieuses de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel; selon la Réformation de sainte Têrèse en France: des troubles & différends excitez en cet Ordre: & du jugement rendu par nostre saint Père le Pape sur iceux*. A Messeigneurs les illustrissimes & reverendissimes Cardinaux de La Rochefoucauld & de Retz. Par messire Michel de Marillac, conseiller du Roy en son Conseil d'Etat (Paris: Edme Martin, 1622).

and others in the foundation of the Ursulines in Paris in 1610, and with Pierre de Bérulle in founding the Oratorians in 1611.<sup>16</sup>

We should note the outburst of new and reformed orders taking place in France and elsewhere during these years. To name but two, Saint Jeanne de Lestonnac (1556-1640), a niece of the famous essayist Michel de Montaigne and the widowed baroness of the fabled Château de Landiras, worked closely with Jesuits in Bordeaux to found the Sisters of Notre-Dame (or *La Compagnie de Marie Notre-Dame*) in 1607; and Saint Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641), who worked alongside Saint François de Sales in founding the Order of the Visitation (or *La Visitation Sainte-Marie*) in 1610. François de Sales (1567-1622), the so-called bishop of Geneva, advised the Acarie circle during his lengthy visit to Paris in 1602. In 1609, he wrote the widely influential *Introduction à la vie dévote*. Jeanne de Chantal was initially attracted to the Carmel in Dijon, and it should be mentioned that Vincent de Paul knew her well and regarded her as “one of the holiest people [he had] ever met on this earth.”<sup>17</sup>

I mention these two foundations in particular because of their resemblance to the Daughters of Charity, later founded by Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul. All three focussed on providing concrete aid, succor, and instruction in salvation to the sick, poor, and orphaned, as well as vocational education for girls aimed at facilitating their survival in the secular world. In contrast, Louise’s uncle devoted his principal efforts to support of the Carmelites, a contemplative order seeking retreat from the world. While my studies have turned up virtually no evidence that Michel de Marillac was much concerned with questions of poverty or social suffering, except in the abstract or as broad political policy,<sup>18</sup> he does appear to have developed a capacity for mysticism through his frequent involvement with

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<sup>16</sup> The extraordinarily saintly and energetic Barbe Avrillot (1566-1618) was beatified in 1791. Married in 1582 to Pierre Acarie, and widowed in 1613, she then followed three of their daughters into the Carmelite sisterhood, taking the name Marie de l’Incarnation. Her cousin, Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), was named a cardinal two years before his death; ordained as a priest in 1599, he was appointed one of the original three Superiors for the French reformed Carmelites, along with André Duval and Jacques Gallemand.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. and updated by Catherine Rachel John (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 180.

<sup>18</sup> For example, among Marillac’s arguments in favoring political reform over an expanded war was a potential amelioration of the poor’s tax burdens. Although some scholars have described this aspect of the *dévot* program as a financial aspiration of the noble class, whose feudal dues could increase if taxes were reduced, I have found no evidence of such *dévot* cynicism / calculation. The *dévots/dévotes* may have been naive and patronizing, but selfishness was not apparent in their activities.

the pious Carmelites.<sup>19</sup> Whatever Louise may have learned from him, she significantly enhanced.

So, now let us consider Louise de Marillac and her uncle together. It is obvious that the extended Marillac family made exceptional contributions to French society for well over a century, in both political and religious institutions and activities. The family context into which Louise was born would lead us to expect the same piety, energy, and administrative capacity that indeed we find in her. And yet, her life might well have missed such fulfillment, for her childhood and youth were hardly settled or secure. She may even have been troubled throughout her life with doubts concerning her own baptism.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars have largely cleared up the mysteries surrounding her birth, but an innocent search in genealogical reference works reveals a variety of sometimes rather wild claims.<sup>21</sup> Her father was Michel's elder full brother, Louis de Marillac, *seigneur de Ferrières-en-Brie, Capitaine des gendarmes de la Maison du Roi*, and / or *Conseiller au Parlement de Paris*. Her mother was Marguerite Le Camus, with whom Louis had a liaison between two marriages. Louis never denied his responsibility, but there is no mention of her mother's having remained in Louise's life at all, nor even any mention of step-mothering — a benefit her uncle Michel most likely had enjoyed himself. On the eve of his remarriage in 1595, her father placed the scarcely four-year-old Louise with the Dominican nuns at Poissy, among whom an aunt was a prominent member.<sup>22</sup> Louis de Marillac moved his natural

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Baptiste Eriau writes that the religiously observant life of the Carmelites ("ascetic and mystical") deepened the spiritual life of both Acarie and Marillac (his especially, as he had further to go). Marillac was rapidly initiated "into all the secrets of the interior life" by them. He organized "his household as a sort of monastery and communicated to his family and associates [aux siens] his own spiritual tastes." His letters to Mother Magdeleine de Saint-Joseph show an intense interior life. Eriau, *L'Ancien Carmel du faubourg Saint-Jacques* (Paris: J. de Gigord & A. Picard, 1929), 465 + note 1.

<sup>20</sup> This possibility was related to me in a private conversation (9 March 1999) with Professor Bernard Barbiche of the École des Chartes. One must wonder, however, whether the two dates suggested for Louise's birth (15 March 1591, at Ferrières-en-Brie, in the Marillac's native province of Auvergne, or 12 August, in Paris) suggest that the second was, rather, her date of baptism. Yet, it has been asserted that she was baptized in Ferrières-en-Brie *before* being taken to Paris. See, <http://missel.free.fr/Sanctoral/03/15.php> (p. 2, accessed 12 July 2010). However, it remains possible that what scholars have claimed was not known to a girl whose early years were so unstable.

<sup>21</sup> Most of both the established and fanciful details, and their sources, can be found in the Genealogical Appendix to my transcription / edition of Lezeau's *Vie de Marillac*. Although I have encountered more examples since, I shall not attempt to present them here.

<sup>22</sup> Many genealogists designate the two Louises as aunt and niece, even though the elder was in fact the aunt of the younger's father. See, for example: [http://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/fr/st\\_louise\\_de\\_marillac.aspx](http://www.filles-de-la-charite.org/fr/st_louise_de_marillac.aspx) (accessed 12 July 2010).

daughter to a more modest accommodation some seven years later, in 1602, and then, on 25 July 1604, he died. Uncle Michel now became the guardian of his approximately thirteen-year-old niece and her younger half-sister.

Thus, in the opening decade of the new century, the royal bureaucrat and religious reformer Michel de Marillac found himself the guardian of at least three nieces: Saint Louise, her less than three-year-old half-sister Innocente de Marillac, and, perhaps a few years later, Catherine du Plessis, a niece of Marillac's through his second wife Marie de Saint-Germain (married 1601). Marillac had himself been orphaned at the same age as Louise, and so might have been expected to empathize with the fate of his nieces. On Innocente's sixth birthday (1607), Marillac put her, along with his own daughter Valence (now about eight years old) — no mention of Louise here! — into the newly established Ursuline convent in Paris.<sup>23</sup> I am not aware that we know very much about Michel and Louise's interactions during this period. But it may be instructive to note, that, once Louise achieved adulthood, their subsequent correspondence reveals very little personal interaction between uncle and niece.<sup>24</sup> What is known is that Saint Louise was erudite, devout, and spiritually quite sensitive, and in these respects she reflected her uncle's attributes at a similar age.

The respectable marriage Louise entered into, despite her inclinations towards a religious life, probably served the ambitions of the half-brothers Michel and Louis de Marillac as much as it provided her social standing and security. Louise's proposed husband was Antoine Le Gras (ca. 1577-1625), private secretary (*secrétaire des commandements*) of Marie de Medici, the Queen Mother. Nonetheless, on 18 October 1613, a son, Michel-Antoine, was born to the couple some eight months after their marriage, and they appear to have been happy. Madame Le Gras's spiritual crises, however, continued to torment her, despite the interventions of François de Sales and

<sup>23</sup> In 1617, Innocente married Jean d'Aspremont, sgr de Vandy. They were to have one daughter, Catherine de Vandy (1620-1685), who became a *filles d'honneur* to the "Grande Mademoiselle." Marie-Andrée Jégou, O.S.U., *Les Ursulines du Faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris (1607-1662). Origine d'un monastère apostolique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), 19, and note 30; among others.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Dominique Mellot, *Histoire du Carmel de Pontoise, I, 1605-1792* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1994), 20, note 5.

Nonetheless, if it is true that after 1619 Madame Le Gras (Louise) and her husband took charge of the seven orphans of her father's widowed half-sister,\* Valence de Marillac-Dony (d. 1617), and her husband Octavien II Dony d'Attichy (d. 1614), Louise would have shared this responsibility with her uncle Michel, who was also involved in their well-being and education.

\* See, <http://missel.free.fr/Sanctoral/03/15.php> (p. 2, accessed 12 July 2010). It should also be noted that Louise's marriage was proposed not only by her two uncles, but by the husband of this aunt, the same Octavien II Dony d'Attichy, who was equally interested in strengthening his political connections. See, <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise> (p. 2, accessed 12 July 2010). However, he died the year after the marriage.

others in 1619. Perhaps because of a pre-mature birth, Michel-Antoine was never robust, and then his father fell gravely ill in 1622. The latter died on 21 December 1625, leaving Louise a wealthy widow.<sup>25</sup> By this time, she had already encountered Vincent de Paul, who took over Louise's spiritual direction towards the end of 1624.

Apart from providing context to Louise and Michel's interrelationships, it is not my concern, of course, to present Louise de Marillac's life, let alone the extraordinary partnership forged over the next 35 years with Vincent de Paul. It suffices, I hope, to reiterate that we know little about her direct interactions with her uncle. It is quite probable that he responsibly looked after her material needs, her educational and spiritual development, though without being any closer or warmer to her than he was to anyone else. In any case, during the period of her marriage and early widowhood Michel was phenomenally preoccupied with affairs of state.



Engraving of Cardinal Richelieu (1582-1642).

By Robert Nanteuil, 1657. Collection of the Yale University Art Gallery.

*Public Domain*

<sup>25</sup> Specific information about the marriage and family, some of which I had not previously encountered, comes from Comte de Lambel, *La Bienheureuse Louise de Marillac (Mademoiselle Le Gras) Co-fondatrice de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité* (Paris-Lille: A. Taffin-Lefort, 1919), 218 p.: marriage on 5 February 1613 (p. 23); Michel-Antoine born on 19 October 1613 (Lambel says only "dès la fin de l'année," p. 32); widowed 21 December 1625 (p. 34); son's marriage in 1650 to Gabrielle le Clerc, daughter of sgr. de Chenevières, and one daughter born (pp. 32-3).

Others, however, describe her financial position as "precarious," though perhaps to emphasize her saintly generosity in donating at least part of her wealth to Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet. For example, <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise> (p. 2, accessed 12 July 2010).

One scholar does, however, speak of her “retiring from Court” in 1625.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that, before widowhood, she had been participating in the social life expected of women of her status, a responsibility quite likely reinforced by her uncle’s (and no doubt her husband’s) political ambitions. With her uncle’s disgrace and death during the fledgling years of the Daughters of Charity, both discretion and her own challenging preoccupations undoubtedly kept niece and uncle personally apart.

Cardinal Richelieu, with royal sanction, treated the two Marillac half-brothers brutally after the Day of Dupes (10-11 November 1630); coincidentally, the wife of the *maréchal*, and the Capuchin son of the *garde des sceaux* died at about the same time. The Queen Mother herself suffered exile from France. One has to wonder how this affected others closely attached to these rivals. It is thus noteworthy that Richelieu’s own niece, Madame d’Aiguillon (marquise de Combalet), a friend to both the Carmelites and later to the Daughters of Charity, helped Marillac’s daughter-in-law circumvent the Cardinal’s attempts to hinder funeral arrangements. Meanwhile François Sublet des Noyers, a royal councilor close to both Marillac and the Carmelites, was soon to be made Minister of War on Richelieu’s recommendation. Vincent de Paul himself seems not to have come under suspicion for his associations with other leading *dévots*, nor was his work hindered in any way. It also appears that Louise de Marillac’s life and activities in these crucial, fertile years similarly suffered no impediments that could be ascribed to Richelieu’s suspicions or animosities. Nor do other Marillac relations appear to have had their careers interrupted.<sup>27</sup>

What I hope has been both interesting and of use in this article, however, is a richer understanding of the extraordinary family from which Louise de Marillac emerged — and especially of the life and career of her equally noteworthy uncle. Despite the obscurity and dishonor surrounding her birth, Louise appears to have received the same sustenance and education as that of her legitimate half-sister and her cousins, and to have benefitted

<sup>26</sup> Jean-François Dubost, “Une Reine et une Capitale Catholiques,” part of “Reine, Régente, Reine Mère,” in *Marie de Médicis et le Palais de Luxembourg*, éd. Marie-Noëlle Baudouin-Matuszek (Paris: Délégation à l’Action Artistique de la Ville de Paris, 1991), p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> This fact contrasts strongly, for instance, with the fate of Nicolas Lefèvre de Lezeau’s (Marillac biographer) grandnephews after their father had unexpectedly frustrated Louis XIV’s desires for a quick and severe judgment against Nicolas Fouquet (1615-1680), his recently disgraced finance minister. The vigorous defense of his former colleague by Olivier III Lefèvre d’Ormesson (1616-1686) probably saved Fouquet’s life — but it ended Ormesson’s own career and delayed those of his sons. Jean-François Solnon, *Les Ormesson au plaisir de l’État* ([Paris]: Fayard, 1992), pp. 103-31; also Solon’s article in François Bluche, *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*. One must soften one’s censure of Richelieu from time to time and admire his perspicacity in judging competence and loyalty.



throughout her life and career from such advantages. These advantages both contrasted with those experienced by Vincent de Paul in his youth, yet complemented the capacities he brought to the enterprises of his later life. Furthermore, Michel de Marillac stood out from almost all his lay colleagues for his exceptional spiritual devotion, and for the energy and generosity he brought to the French Catholic Reformation. In her uncle and guardian, especially, and not simply the Marillac family in general, Louise de Marillac had a model of devout practice and spiritual commitment that undoubtedly contributed profoundly to her own. Perhaps it is appropriate that, today, they are both emerging from the shadows.